

Message Text

SECRET

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 1654
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 2938

EXDIS (DISTRIBUTE AS NODIS)

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, PINT, PBOR, XF, IS
SUBJ: MR. WEIZMAN GOES TO WASHINGTON

REF: TEL AVIV 2786 (NOTAL)

1. DEFENSE MINISTER EZIR WEIZMAN LEAVES FOR THE UNITED STATES MARCH 5 ON HIS FIRST OFFICIAL VISIT TO WASHINGTON. HE GOES WITH VERY MIXED FEELINGS: HOPING TO HAVE SUCCESSFUL TALKS WITH SECRETARY BROWN, SECRETARY VANCE, AND OTHER KEY OFFICIALS ABOUT THE LONG-TERM DEFENSE REQUIREMENTS FOR ISRAEL AND EAGER TO HAVE A FRANK MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CARTER ABOUT THE CURRENT STATE OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS ON THE ONE HAND, YET HIGHLY APPREHENSIVE ABOUT BEING CONSTRAINED TO PLAY THE ROLE OF SPEAR CARRIER FOR PRIME MINISTER BEGIN DURING BEGIN'S OWN WHITE HOUSE MEETINGS.

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2. EVENTS HAVE CONSPIRED TO MAKE WEIZMAN THE CURRENT DARLING OF THOSE ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM WHO ARE DEEPLY WORRIED THAT THE PEACE PROCESS IS FALTERING AS A RESULT OF BEGIN'S RIGID NEGOTIATING TACTICS. WEIZMAN'S TRIPS TO EGYPT AND HIS WIDELY PUBLICIZED RAPPORT WITH SADAT AND GAMASY ARE CAUSING HIM INCREASING TROUBLE WITH HIS OWN HERUT PARTY, AND SIMULTANEOUSLY AROUSING BEGIN'S SUSPICIONS THAT HIS PUTATIVE HEIR-APPARENT

IS BECOMING A THREAT TO HIS OWN POSITION. ABOVE ALL, WEIZMAN IS ALMOST DESPERATE IN HIS CONVICTION THAT AN HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY FOR PEACE WITH EGYPT IS SLIPPING THROUGH HIS GOVERNMENT'S FINGERS. HE IS FED UP WITH SHARON'S PROVOCATIONS ON THE SETTLEMENTS QUESTION, AND NOW OUTSPOKENLY DEMANDING BEGIN'S SUPPORT IN BLOCKING THEM. HE HAS NO PATIENCE WITH LEGAL AND SEMANTIC GAMES OVER "DECLARATIONS OF PRINCIPLES". HIS APPROACH TOWARD ISRAEL'S BOTTOM-LINE NEGOTIATING POSITION REFLECTS A CONCERN FOR GENUINE SECURITY MATTERS AND A DISDAIN FOR IDEOLOGICAL DEMAGOGUERY. ALL IN ALL, HE CONFRONTS HIS FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE WASHINGTON COLOSSUS A VERY TROUBLED MAN.

3. WEIZMAN KNOWS FULL WELL IF HE MAKES A MIS-STEP IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH BEGIN HE RISKS EXILE AGAIN TO THE POLITICAL WILDERNESS, AS OCCURRED WHEN HE TOOK BEGIN ON IN 1972. HE WORKED LOYALLY AND FAITHFULLY FOR BEGIN'S ELECTION, AND BELIEVES HIS CAMPAIGN MANAGEMENT WHILE BEGIN WAS HORS DE COMBAT FOLLOWING HIS HEART ATTACK PRODUCED THE LIKUD VICTORY. UNTIL VERY RECENTLY, WEIZMAN TENDED CAREFULLY TO BUSINESS AT THE DEFENSE MINISTRY, KEPT HIS OWN COUNSEL AND AVOIDED THE PRESS. BY ALL ACCOUNTS HE HAS DEMONSTRATED AN IMPRESSIVE PROFESSIONALISM IN HIS APPROACH TO ISRAEL'S DEFENSE PROBLEMS. PRIOR TO SADAT'S EPOCHAL TRIP TO JERUSALEM, HE REMAINED CONVINCED THAT WAR WAS LIKELY AGAIN IN THE NEAR FUTURE BECAUSE NO ARAB LEADER WAS PREPARED TO MAKE PEACE.

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4. SADAT'S INITIATIVE AND THE DIRECT ENCOUNTERS WITH THE FACE OF EGYPT THAT ENSUED MADE AN EXTRAORDINARY IMPACT ON WEIZMAN. HE HAS NOT BECOME A "DOVE" OVERNIGHT, NOR DOES HE DESERVE THOSE SNIDE COMMENTS FROM HIS OPPONENTS WHICH ALLEGE HE "ENJOYS GOING TO EGYPT WITH HIS WIFE TOO MUCH". RATHER HE IS TOTALLY PERSUADED THAT THIS IS INDEED AN HISTORIC MOMENT WHEN PEACE WITH EGYPT IS POSSIBLE, AND THIS MOMENT MAY NOT COME AGAIN IN HIS LIFETIME. HE IS PERSUADED OF BOTH SADAT'S AND GAMASY'S SINCERITY, AND FINDS BOTH OF THEM MEN WITH WHOM HE CAN DEAL. HE HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY INFLUENCED BY LONG PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS WITH GAMASY TO BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND EGYPT'S PROBLEMS IN THE ARAB WORLD AS WELL AS HOW ISRAELI POLICY APPEARS TO OTHERS. HE FINDS IT POSSIBLE TO DEAL PROFESSIONALLY ABOUT ISRAEL'S SECURITY CONCERNS WITH AN EGYPTIAN GENERAL WHOM HE HIGHLY RESPECTS. SIMULTANEOUSLY, WEIZMAN HAS BEEN CHAFFING WITH INCREASING FRUSTRATION UNDER THE LIMITATIONS OF A PRIME MINISTER AND SOME CABINET AND PARTY COLLEAGUES WHO DO NOT SHARE HIS APPRECIATION OF THE DIPLOMATIC NECESSITIES OR OF THE OPPORTUNITY THAT LIES BEFORE THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT.

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EXDIS (DISTRIBUTE AS NODIS)

5. SHARON AND WEIZMAN HAVE A LONG STANDING ENMITY. WEIZMAN DOES NOT TRUST SHARON, AND HAS BEEN FREQUENTLY FURIOUS IN RECENT WEEKS AT THE WAY IN WHICH SHARON HAS MANIPULATED HIS POSITION AS CHAIRMAN OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE ON SETTLEMENTS TO THROW PROVOCATIVE SPANNERS IN THE WHEELS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS. WEIZMAN FINALLY EXPLODED THIS WEEK AND HAS AT LEAST TEMPORARILY OBTAINED BEGIN'S SUPPORT AGAINST SHARON TO BLOCK THE MOST RECENT SETTLEMENT PROVOCATIONS IN THE SINAI. BUT HE IS FAR FROM CONFIDENT OF KEEPING BEGIN WITH HIM SO LONG AS SHARON REMAINS IN THE CABINET WITH AN IDEOLOGICAL AFFINITY FOR BEGIN'S OWN CLASSIC CONVICTIONS. HE HAS ALSO RECENTLY BECOME SOMEWHAT DISILLUSIONED WITH DAYAN. FOR THE FIRST FEW MONTHS THEIR RELATIONSHIP WORKED WELL. NOW WEIZMAN IS SAYING FRANKLY IN PRIVATE THAT HE "DOESN'T KNOW WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO MOSHE". HE REFERS TO DAYAN'S COMPLICATED MANEUVERINGS TO STAY CLOSE TO BEGIN AND YET STAKE OUT HIS OWN INDEPENDENT POSITION ON THE NEGOTIATING ISSUES. DAYAN IS BASICALLY TOO MUCH OF A MACHIAVELLIAN FOR WEIZMAN TO BE COMFORT-
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ABLE WITH PROFESSIONALLY. YET WEIZMAN REMAINS A DAYAN ADMIRER AT HEART; LIKE MANY OTHER ISRAELIS OF HIS GENERATION, WEIZMAN

CAN NEITHER FORGIVE DAYAN FOR HIS SINS NOR ESCAPE HIS CHARISMA. WEIZMAN REALIZES THAT DAYAN IS NOW JEALOUS OF WEIZMAN'S GREATER SUCCESS IN HIS NEGOTIATING ROLE AND IN SUPPLANTING DAYAN IN THE PUBLIC EYE AS THE REAL "NUMBER TWO" IN THE CABINET. AND HE TRIES TO MAKE ALLOWANCES.

6. WEIZMAN IS VERY APPREHENSIVE ABOUT BEGIN'S IMPENDING MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CARTER. HE DISAGREES WITH A FAIR PERCENTAGE OF BEGIN'S RECENT NEGOTIATING TACTICS. HE HAS NO CONFIDENCE THAT BEGIN WILL FIND A WAY TO RE-ESTABLISH HIS CREDIBILITY WITH THE PRESIDENT. HE SEES CLEARLY THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE U.S. DECISION TO SUBMIT AIRPLANE SALES TO ISRAEL, SAUDI ARABIA AND EGYPT AS A PACKAGE TO THE CONGRESS, AND HE IS NOT CONFIDENT THAT HE WILL COME BACK FROM WASHINGTON WITH ENOUGH SUCCESS IN THE MILITARY AID FIELD TO JUSTIFY HIS TRIP. BUT HIS REAL WORRY IS THAT HE WILL BE SEEN BY THE ISRAELI PUBLIC AS A PARTICIPANT IN A SHOWDOWN AT THE WHITE HOUSE BETWEEN CARTER AND BEGIN IN WHICH BEGIN COMES OFF THE LOSER.

7. WEIZMAN COMES FROM A POLITICAL TRADITION AND FAMILY WHICH GIVES HIM NO INFERIORITY COMPLEXES. HE FULLY BELIEVES HE WILL SOMEDAY BE PRIME MINISTER AND THAT HE WILL BE A GOOD ONE. HE TOYS CURRENTLY WITH THE IDEA OF RESIGNING FROM A BEGIN CABINET WHICH HE SEES AS INCREASINGLY DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF AND FAILING TO GOVERN EFFECTIVELY, MUCH LESS MAKE PEACE. YET HE REMEMBERS HIS LONG YEARS IN THE POLITICAL WILDERNESS, AND DOUBTS THAT GOING HOME TO TEND HIS GARDEN IS THE PATH BACK TO POWER. HE HAS A HEALTHY RESPECT FOR BEGIN'S POLITICAL INSTINCT FOR THE JUGULAR AND HIS FORMIDABLE DEMOGOGIC SKILLS AT SIMPLIFYING AND FOCUSING ISSUES TO THE DETREMENT OF HIS OPPONENTS. MOST OF ALL HE KNOWS TOO WELL BEGIN'S REACTION TO PERSONAL DISLOYALTY. ALL OF THIS
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GIVES WEIZMAN GREAT PAUSE AT PUSHING HIS DIFFERENCES TO THE POINT OF A BREAK.

8. AT THIS STAGE IN U.S.-ISRAELI RELATIONS, WEIZMAN IS AN IMPORTANT ASSET BOTH FOR THE PEACE PROCESS AND FOR THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES. HE IS A GOOD BET IF HE DOES NOT MAKE A MIS-STEP TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER SOONER OR LATER. HE IS CHARISMATIC, INCREASINGLY RESPECTED, WITH THE RIGHT ANTECEDENTS, AND A MAN OF VERY SUBSTANTIAL ABILITIES. HE DOES NOT UNDERSTAND AS WELL AS HE SHOULD SOME OF THE FACTS OF INTERNATIONAL LIFE BUT HE IS LEARNING THEM RAPIDLY. HIS WASHINGTON TRIP SHOULD BE REGARDED IN LARGE MEASURE AS A STIMULUS TO HIM TO STAY THE COURSE AND WORK FOR MODERATE NEGOTIATING STRATEGIES WITHIN THE PRESENT POLITICAL FRAMEWORK. IF WE TREAT IT IN THIS FASHION, IT WILL ADVANCE BOTH HIS INTERESTS AND OURS. WERE HE TO BECOME PREMATURELY SO DISCOURAGED THAT HE WITHDRAW FROM THE BATTLEFIELD, HIS INFLUENCE

FOR PRAGMATISM IN THE CURRENT NEGOTIATING SITUATION WOULD BE LOST; BEGIN WOULD BECOME EVEN LESS RESPONSIVE TO THE DIPLOMATIC IMPERATIVES; AND THE CHANCES FOR ACHIEVING PEACE WOULD FURTHER DEMINISH.

9. AS FOR WEIZMAN'S POSITIONS. ON SOME OF THE KEY NEGOTIATING ISSUES; THERE IS LITTLE TO ADD TO REFTEL. HE SUFFERS WITH BEGIN'S EFFORT TO REINTERPET 242 AND WANTS TO AVOID THE SUBJECT. HE IS ATTRACTED TO PERES' IDEA OF JOINT ISRAELI-JORDANIAN ADMINISTRATION (A SORT OF WEST BANK CONDOMINIUM) FOR A LONG INTERIM PERIOD, WHILE SHARING BEGIN'S WORRIES ABOUT THE OUTCOME OF ANY EVENTUAL PLEBICITE. BUT HIS MAIN FOCUS IS ON EGYPT- TO THE POINT OF OBSESSION. AND HE STILL BELIEVES THAT SOMEHOW PEACE WITH EGYPT CAN AND MUST BE ACHIEVED.

10. A FINAL CAVEAT. WEIZMAN'S PERSONAL STYLE INSPIRES FRANKNESS AND CONFIDENCE. HE CAN BE MORE DISCREET THAN MOST ISRAELIS, BUT HE SHARES THE NATIONAL TRAIT FOR COMPULSIVE POLITICAL DISCUSSION WITH INTIMATES. THOSE WHO MEET HIM SHOULD KEEP THIS CLEARLY
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